

From: Dan Moore
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 12/14/01 1:50pm
Subject: Why microsoft software should not be in public schools.

To whom it may concern,

I am a computer programmer who has worked as a system administrator and a technical support provider for unix, windows, and macintosh machines. I'm currently working on an electrical engineering degree from the University of Utah. I've been very concerned about the Microsoft Settlement currently proposed by the Department of Justice. The Microsoft Windows Operating System is uniquely unsuited to the public education sector. I believe this to be true for a number of reasons :

1) There are several very good Operating Systems available free of cost (all of the distributions of both Linux and BSD can be obtained for free, the GNU Hurd will soon be freely available). My wife teaches seventh grade english and I believe it's evident that there are many ways in which the funds allocated for public education could be better spent than on complicated and crippling expensive licenses.

2) Microsoft software makes an effort to hide from the user many of the fundamental processes that a computer routinely performs in day to day operation. The objective of hiding these processes is to make a computer easier to use and probably accounts, in large part, for Microsoft's success in the market, but does not seem suited to educating young people about how computers work. If a person can use a unix clone operating system (such as Linux, BSD, or Hurd) that person can easily adapt to Microsoft software and is often more competent than life long Microsoft users. As the goal is education it seems apparent that unix clones are the better alternative.

3) Most operating systems in use today (including the MS Dos Operating system upon which the windows operating systems are based) are based on Unix. This makes it a very easy jump from Unix to any other Operating System.

4) The freely available software is most often willing to furnish the source code for the Operating Systems and all applications. The educational value of this for Computer Programming students cannot be overstated. For students to be able to examine the source code of professionals will help produce a generation of skilled, creative programmers with very professional coding styles.

5) Microsoft is a for-profit corporation. Adam Smith warned of the dangers of Government Sponsored Monopolies. To place Microsoft Software in schools is a government endorsement of their product. This could certainly be viewed as a sanction. There are many distributions of operating systems furnished entirely by not-for-profit volunteer organizations. (Look at www.debian.org and www.gnu.org for starters). The use of these non-corporate operating systems would help to protect capitalist ideals of a free market and of no government endorsements of corporations.

Taking into account the considerations that makes Microsoft software unsuitable for public education, I feel strongly that the anti-trust settlement ought to be altered such that Microsoft makes their contribution to public education entirely in computer hardware, and that software better suited to public education be selected by schools to be put on those machines.

-Dan